

HINTS

FOR THE

PRACTICAL ADMINISTRATION

OF THE

POOR LAWS.

*UNDER THE SUPERINTENDENCE OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE
DIFFUSION OF USEFUL KNOWLEDGE.*

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ONE of the heaviest burthens borne by agriculturists is the Poor Rate : any practical mode of lessening the amount of this impost will not be unworthy our attention, especially if, at the same time, such diminution can be shown to be beneficial rather than injurious to the working classes.

The administration of the poor laws is confessedly very different in different parts of England, and as the effects of the difference are plainly perceived both in the amount of the rates and the depression of the workmen, it may be worth while to consider what is the best plan to adopt.

In one county, we shall find, the poor rates amount to 1*l.* per head on the whole population, as in Sussex ; in another, it will only be 4*s.* per head, as in Lancashire ; and while the local expenditure (of which far the largest portion is for the maintenance of the poor) is in some counties, as Sussex or Bedford, above 6*s.* in the pound on what is probably the full annual value,—in other counties, as in Northumberland, Cumberland, the North Riding of Yorkshire, and Shropshire, it varies from 1*s.* 7*½d.* to 2*s.* 5*d.* in the pound*.

That these differences in the amount of rates arise chiefly from the difference of management, we have the testimony of numerous able writers, and of several Reports of Parliamentary Committees, resting upon evi-

* Accounts of Local Taxation, ordered by the House of Commons to be printed, Dec. 6, 1830, paper 52. The information given is very important, and the deductions curious.

We have made, from the returns to Parliament, a calculation as to the proportion of the cost of the poor, comparing the average of the three years 1812, 13, and 14, with the three years 1827, 28, and 29. The average expenditure of the three former years was about 6,400,000*l.*, with corn at 10*s.* per quarter ; of the three latter years, 6,300,000*l.*, with corn at 5*7s.* per quarter. We have calculated that two-thirds of the expenditure on the poor varies with the price of corn. Then to maintain the same number of poor with the same proportioned allowances in the latter period, the cost ought to have stood—

One-third part of cost, stationary	£2,100,000
Two-thirds at rate of corn three last years, 46 per cent. reduced	2,200,000

£4,300,000

but the actual cost is 6,300,000*l.*, that is, an excess of what it ought to be of nearly one half of what the whole should amount to. Making an allowance for the increase in population of 24 per cent. in the fifteen years, yet bearing in mind this has chiefly been in manufacturing counties, where the rates are not augmented in proportion, we shall come to a conclusion that there is an increase in the proportion of expenditure on the poor, and probably of the numbers of poor, of above one-fourth in fifteen years. The above calculation, if not quite exact, will show the main points deserving of attention.

dence. Abuses of various kinds have been introduced, in many of the southern counties especially, productive of serious injury to the landowner and the peasantry.

The execution of the poor laws being generally left to the farmers of the parish, we shall endeavour, as briefly and clearly as possible, to point out how this important duty should be executed.

It seems evident that the execution of these laws, like every work undertaken by man, will be better executed by those who have experience in the matter, and who constantly attend to it, than by those who are unwillingly obliged to leave for a short time their usual occupations, to betake themselves to this rather unpleasant task. Hence it will be seen that it is not very likely that the old mode, still adhered to in many parishes, will succeed, of appointing annually two inhabitants as overseers, upon whom is to devolve for a twelvemonth the administration of the poor laws within the district. Unacquainted previously for the most part with the complex laws they have to administer, and having little personal knowledge of the applicants, they will content themselves generally with getting through the necessary business with as little trouble as possible, and will follow pretty nearly the practice of their predecessors, whatever it may be, especially if sanctioned by the neighbouring justices*. A twelvemonth having elapsed, (too short a period for the former overseers to become acquainted with their duty,) fresh ones are appointed, who have everything to learn! Such a system is almost sure to cause or perpetuate abuses.

If a parish be sincerely desirous to lessen their expenses and duly administer the law, their first step should be to appoint a permanent overseer, paid by the parish, answerable to the vestry, and removable for misconduct. It will be the business of this person to acquaint himself with the law, and his duty to execute it; he must devote himself to this object, and will soon become acquainted with the characters of applicants and the best mode of dealing with them.

There is no difficulty whatever in the appointment of such an officer. The rated inhabitants have only to meet together in vestry, and agree to employ such a paid overseer, and his appointment will be confirmed by the justices, as provided by the 59 Geo. III. c. 12†.

* 'Named only for one year, and in general anxious chiefly to get rid of his office with as little trouble to himself as possible ;' or if 'he endeavours, in spite of clamour and vexation, to improve the practice, his designs are liable to be overset by the orders of magistrates.'—*Report on Labourers' Wages*, p. 6, 1824.

† It would be of the greatest advantage that some alteration should take place in the law, so as to allow to the *owner* of rated property, or his agent, considerable power in laying on the poor rate, and administering it when raised; in which case, the owner should contribute a certain proportion of the rate: at present it is under the sole control of the occupier, who pays the whole. The tenant-occupier, however, has not the same permanent interest in the proper management of the rate as the owner has: if the rates increase, the tenant on each fresh letting will make this a ground for a diminished rent, and often thinks it is for *his* interest to keep wages as low as possible, however high the rates may thereby be raised; and this accounts for some of the abuses of the poor law prevalent in several counties of the south of England. If the owner paid a proportion of the rate, its increase would be a salutary warning to him that some attention to the subject was necessary, and his interest would direct him to improve the condition of the workmen, as the only true and permanent mode of keeping the rates low. In ordinary cases and in agricultural districts, it is a general rule that rates and wages vary inversely to each other: if wages are high, rates are low; and if rates are high, wages are low. In Scotland, the rate is laid on by the heritors only, or their agents, in conjunction with the clergyman, and paid in equal portions by heritor and occupier, and expended by the minister and kirk session.

In above two thousand parishes such permanent overseers are now employed, and are, almost without exception, found highly useful : the amount of their remuneration is generally saved over and over to the parish by the diminution of other expenses.

If the parish in question be so small as not to require the constant attention of the permanent overseer, he may combine the business with the care of some adjacent parish or parishes similarly situated, or with any other occupation. The duties, however, to be performed, if duly executed, are so numerous, that in most parishes his time will be pretty much engaged, as will be seen when we come to consider how he ought to act.

We have stated that, in a parish containing small numbers, a permanent overseer, acting under the control of the annual overseers, may be sufficient ; but in every populous parish there should also be a select or elected vestry, chosen under that useful Act of Parliament 59 Geo. III. c. 12, commonly called Mr. Sturges Bourne's Act, and consisting of any number, from five to twenty *.

These persons being chosen by the rate-payers, the latter are, of course, interested to choose such respectable and intelligent inhabitants as are likely to attend to a subject alike important to themselves, their neighbours, and the humbler classes. The services of these vestrymen are unpaid and voluntary ; but as they may be re-elected or removed by the rate-payers at certain periods, it is not likely that others than those willing to do their best will consent to act.

The paid overseer is completely under the control of such a select vestry : it will be their duty to investigate and manage the parish expenditure ; and they ought annually to publish a balance-sheet, for the satisfaction of the parishioners, drawn up in the same form for the convenience of comparing one year's outgoings with another's, and divided into separate heads of expense, in as simple and short a manner as possible, so as to be plain to the capacity of every rate-payer †.

Having thus a permanent overseer and (in a large parish) a select vestry, it is necessary, in order to carry the law into effect, that there should be, within or near the parish, an efficient workhouse and poorhouse. These may be either together or separate ; but they are better separate, for reasons we shall soon state. In general they are united, and in many parishes, though there be a nominal workhouse, it really is nothing but a poorhouse.

Those to whom assistance is to be afforded from the poor rate, are described in the words of the important statute, 43 Eliz., c. 2, §. 1, as follows :—

' The churchwardens and overseers, with the consent of two justices, shall take order, from time to time, for setting to work the children of all such whose parents shall not, by the said churchwardens and overseers, or the greater part of them, be thought able to keep and maintain their children, and for *setting to work* all such persons, married or unmarried, having no means to maintain them, and using no ordinary and daily trade of life to get their living by ; and for the necessary relief of the lame, im-

* 'The greatest evils arise from entrusting a business so complicated to inexperienced and inefficient officers ; and much benefit has been produced by taking advantage of the provisions of 59 Geo. III. c. 12, on this subject.'—*Report on Labourers' Wages*, p. 8, 1824..

† At page 19 will be found a printed form of such summary or abstract of the annual receipt and expenditure of a parish.—*Appendix to the Report of the Select Committee on the Poor Laws*, 1819, paper 529. Such an abstract should be distributed, or placed on the church door, to prevent mismanagement.

potent, old, blind, and such other among them being poor and not able to work.'

In this concise form of words, which should never be for a moment lost sight of by those who administer the poor laws, are described at once the persons to whom, and the mode in which, parochial aid is to be given. The evils to rich and poor, but chiefly to the latter, which have arisen by deviating from this statute, are incalculable; and a steady but gradual return to its wholesome enactments seems the only way to avoid still more severe and extended calamities.

It appears that those to whom parochial aid is to be given are divided by the law into two classes, *viz.*, 1st, certain persons who are able to work, who are to be set to work; and 2ndly, the lame, &c., 'others being poor and not able to work,' who are to have necessary relief. The law has thus distinctly marked out two classes, and the different mode in which they are to be treated; and it is of the utmost consequence to the happiness and independence of the humbler ranks that the law should be followed up in practice.

We proceed to make a few remarks on the manner in which this statute should be executed, beginning with those last mentioned in the act, 'being poor and not able to work.' The persons enumerated are the 'lame, impotent, old, blind, and *such* other among them being poor and not able to work'; and in this class is comprised illegitimate orphans and deserted children, with the children, too young to be set to work, of impotent paupers maintained by the parish; to all these 'necessary relief is to be afforded; by which either pecuniary aid or other assistance, derived from 'competent sums of money raised,' appears to have been intended.

Some of the unfortunate persons belonging to this class may best be assisted by allowance from the poor rate, at their own houses, or whilst living with their relatives or friends; and there can be little doubt that, in some instances, this would be the cheaper plan for the parish, as well as most acceptable to the receivers. As, however, applications for such allowances are often unreasonable, and it is necessary for the parish officers to have a power of discriminating in the mode of support given, according to the character and conduct of applicants, it will be of the greatest consequence that they should be able to refuse giving any allowance in money; in which case they must have provided a poorhouse as a receptacle for the impotent poor, where they can be properly maintained.

It will be evident, also, that, besides those who *might* be supported by allowance elsewhere, there must be many, having no relatives or friends to receive them, for whom a home must be provided. These will generally be either the young children, or aged and infirm persons; and a moment's thought will be enough to show that, as far as possible, these should be kept separate. The aged inmates of a poorhouse are frequently of depraved and degraded dispositions; their minds are always soured with disappointment and regret; and they are, of all persons, those with whom young children, whom it is intended to bring up as decent members of society, ought not to associate.

One of the first things necessary in the due regulation of a poorhouse, will be a proper classification of its inmates; even the most infirm will be able to do some work, and as much work should be required from each as is consistent with health and comfort. For this purpose, by a little forethought, some employment may easily be provided. With constant

occupation, being treated with firmness, devoid of undue severity, even the most refractory may be governed without much difficulty. Humanity and good policy, enforced by the law, require that a difference should prevail in the mode of treating those who have been stricken by unmerited infirmity or calamity, from those whose misfortunes are the offspring of their idleness or intemperance.

At last, however, we must confess, it will be a hopeless task to reform, or even much to improve, the aged inmates of a poorhouse; and we must be content that it should remain a receptacle where the miserable are sheltered from starvation, and rescued from the temptations to crime arising from actual want. Its chief use will be to deter persons from having recourse to it, and to stimulate their industry and forethought to preserve their independence. For this essential purpose, a poorhouse ought not to have the appearance of being too comfortable; whatever regulations are laid down should be strictly adhered to; whilst necessities are allowed, indulgences of all kinds should be curtailed; and such wholesome restraints kept up, as shall prevent any, who are without its walls, from relaxing their exertions to keep out.

With respect to the children, we may entertain very different hopes: they will probably grow up according to the training they receive; and if they have early had bad examples set before them, it is of still more consequence that they should be duly educated. This is of great consequence to the parish in a pecuniary as well as in a moral view. We all know that parish apprentices are now looked upon as great evils, instead of being sought after, as likely to become useful servants or assistants.

Nor is this without reason. Brought up, for the most part, amid vice and wretchedness, without the salutary controul of parents, and their education greatly neglected, it is not extraordinary they should frequently turn out idle and depraved, instead of becoming industrious and independent. They often entail cost upon the parish during their whole lives, and sometimes leave a legacy of miserable, diseased, and vicious children, to be supported after their deaths. Should they have obtained a settlement elsewhere, the evil is not less to the community, and each parish must bear its share in this partition of evil.

It is, therefore, a measure of *parish economy*, as well as of true humanity, to educate properly those deserted or destitute children who are cast upon the parish for support. For this purpose, they should be separated from any contact with the aged inmates of the poorhouse, and should at first be assembled in infant schools, where they will learn a little good, and avoid a great deal of evil, never to be afterwards eradicated. When old enough, they should be further instructed, at the parish expense, in what is fitting to make them useful members of society, until they are able to get their own living. It will seldom, indeed, happen in any parish, that there is not some benevolent person, either belonging to the select vestry, or known to the overseer, who will take pleasure in superintending, to a certain extent, the school for these poor orphans, and seeing that their education is not neglected. Though the names of such persons be unknown, and their acts unseen, they are fellow-workmen with the greatest and wisest of mankind, to improve the condition and increase the happiness of the human race.

Just in proportion as these parish children are properly educated or neglected, will be their chance of obtaining situations to earn their subsistence, and the probability of their keeping from being a future burthen to the parish. This important duty of overseers is, in many country dis-

tricts, totally neglected ; the parish children are almost entirely uneducated. With bad examples before them, and no principles to guide them, they become hardened and depraved, and generally end their lives as paupers or criminals. Whoever considers this subject with the attention it deserves, will come to the conclusion, that one-twentieth the trouble and cost expended to repress and punish crimes, would, if early directed to improve and direct the ductile minds of children, have a much wider and more permanent effect. This subject has been well adverted to in the excellent Report of the Committee on the Poor Laws, in 1817, to which we shall hereafter advert.

We cannot refrain, before leaving this part of the subject, from insisting again on the necessity of *infant schools* for the very young : those admirable institutions have been found, in every instance, highly beneficial. The trifling cost, even in saving the clothes of the children and preserving their health, will be repaid. Let no one run away with the false notion, that these are schools for learning or places of confinement ; they are places of exercise and amusement, where attention is easily awakened, where bad passions are corrected, and good feelings instilled. Whoever has seen one of these institutions properly conducted, and has witnessed the children coming voluntarily and cheerfully to its doors, will be quite undeceived in this respect. Such a school there ought to be in every populous parish ; small ones might join together for this purpose. Wherever a large poorhouse, for the use of several parishes, is established, which in some districts is the case, an infant school should be an indispensable adjunct, from whence the inmates may be removed to one fitted for children of more mature age.

It has before been observed, that, independently of the necessity for a poorhouse to receive those paupers who are entirely destitute, it is of the greatest use to prevent imposition, more especially from idle or ill-disposed parishioners, resident in other and perhaps distant parishes. If, on their application for relief, an immediate offer is made to take them into the poorhouse, a great proportion will either decline the offer and shift for themselves, or very soon leave it after experiencing its regulations ; so that the expense of the poorhouse is not to be measured alone by the cost of those *within* its walls, but its saving to the parish must be estimated by a fair consideration of the number of those whom it prevents from imposing on the funds for the poor *.

Having briefly considered the regulations and use of a poorhouse, for the purpose 'of giving necessary relief to the impotent, and others, being poor and not able to work,' it will be necessary to look to the other important directions of the statute which overseers are bound to follow, viz. 'setting to work the children of those who shall not, by the said overseers, be thought able to maintain their children, and for setting to work all such persons, married or unmarried, having no means to maintain them, and following no ordinary and daily trade of life to get their living by.' We may here borrow a little from the Report of a late Committee on the abuses of the poor laws†. 'Your Committee,' says this report, 'refrain from considering what was the meaning attached to the words of the

* By a steady adherence to this improved system under a Select Vestry, the following change took place in Liverpool, notwithstanding an increase in population of 10,000 persons.—1821, 4,717 paupers, cost 36,013l. : 1827, only 2607, cost 19,395l.

—*Ellis, Esq. Evidence before Poor Law Committee, 1828.*

† Report of Select Committee on that part of the poor law relating to the employment and payments of able-bodied persons from the poor rate, 1828.

statute when it was enacted, however interesting such an inquiry might be ; but on this head, they venture to refer to the laborious and valuable investigation to be found in the report on the poor laws in 1817, and the report in 1819. It appears to your Committee, that under the construction now generally put upon these words, it has been held that all parishioners, not able to maintain themselves, have a right to employment by the parish.' It does not, however, appear, that justices have any power, under an order of relief, to enforce this supposed right of employment, which rests upon the discretion of each overseer, who is liable to punishment by law for abusing the power vested in him. 'Whether a man has no means to maintain himself,' and whether a parent 'can maintain his children,' appear to be 'questions letting in a wide discretion, on the part of overseers, as to the facility or difficulty with which they will comply with the requests of persons demanding parochial employment *.'

It would be irrelevant to our present purpose to show here, why it is advantageous to the poor themselves, that this discretionary power should often cast difficulties in the way of those calling upon parishes 'to effect the impracticable purpose of finding employment for all who may at any time require it.'

Whoever were the persons to whom the Act of Parliament extended, and with whatever discretion it may be exercised, one thing is clear, that the relief was to be afforded in one way, viz., '*by setting to work.*' It is, therefore, the first duty of those who have the execution of the poor laws entrusted to them, to provide the means of executing (when it is necessary) this important part of the law. It matters not to say 'the execution of the law is difficult,'—the more will it require our forethought and firmness to carry it into effect. But a little consideration will show us, that the difficulty is exaggerated, and will make apparent to us the numerous evils arising from neglect in the due execution of the law.

Those directed to be set to work are of two descriptions ; first, children ; second, persons having no means to maintain themselves, and using no ordinary and daily trade of life to get their living by.

'Though the persons entitled to relief, and the sort of relief, seem to be pointed out with sufficient clearness, yet the practice has, in many instances, long been at variance with the law. The statute directs the children to be set to work ; the almost general practice is to give money to the parents, without setting the children to work.'

The able report, from whence we borrow this account †, goes on to point out the many evils arising from this deviation of the law, and the necessity of returning to the true system : an extract is there given from a Report of the Board of Trade on this subject, drawn up by the celebrated Mr. Locke in 1697, and well worthy our attention. In like manner, instead of providing employment for the other class to whom the law says it is to be given, money allowances are, in many instances, in the south of England, made instead. We will borrow the words of the Report of a late Committee on this subject. 'In some parishes, a weekly allowance is made to able-bodied labourers, without any employment being given ; in others, they are put up to a kind of auction, as servants, to the best bidder, the difference between the amount paid and their sustenance being paid by the parish. The practice of allowance from the

* Report of Committee, 1828, p. 4.

† Report of Select Committee of House of Commons on the Poor Laws, p. 27, Oct. 1817.

poor rate for the children of labourers appears to prevail very generally in several of the southern counties subsequently named; nor is this at all confined to particular instances of distress from accidental circumstances, but it is adopted throughout large districts as a general rule, from which there is no departure, and to which, by custom, the married poor look as completely a matter of right. In some counties, it appears, the allowance for children is fixed and invariable, according to their number; and in others it is regulated by the price of bread, allowing a certain quantity per head for each member of a family. The Committee on Labourers' Wages, in 1824, lent close attention to this part of the subject; nor can your Committee do better than borrow their words.' After stating that in the northern parts of England these practices do not prevail, and that the wages there are good, they proceed to say, 'in Suffolk, Sussex, Bedfordshire, Bucks, Dorsetshire, and Wilts, the plan of paying wages out of the poor rate has been carried to the greatest extent. Norfolk, Huntingdonshire, and Devonshire are also afflicted with it.' 'Your committee,' (continues the report of 1828,) 'do not find reason to believe that any material improvement has taken place in the counties alluded to in this respect, and in parts of Kent, Hertfordshire, Hants, Surrey, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Middlesex, Berks, and Oxfordshire, the same system has been acted upon *.'

The consequences of the practice above described is stated in the former report in the following words:—'A surplus population is encouraged; men who receive but a small pittance know that they have only to marry, and that pittance will be augmented in proportion to the number of their children. Hence, the supply of labour is by no means regulated by the demand; and parishes are burdened with thirty, forty, or fifty labourers, for whom they can find no employment, and who serve to depress the condition of their fellow-labourers in the same parish.'

An intelligent witness, who was much in the habit of employing labourers, states, that when complaining of their allowance, they frequently say to him, 'we will marry, and you *must* maintain us!' 'By far the worst consequence of the system is' (adds the report), 'the degradation of the character of the labouring class †.'

In very many parts of the wide district to which the above extract applies, it is to be lamented that the magistrates (instead of endeavouring gradually to prevent these abuses, and to bring the practice of the law to what is warranted by the statute, and the example of the north) have been themselves the first to sanction and confirm these abuses. In some counties, the justices have adopted and enforced the worst form of deviation from the law, viz., a uniform scale of money allowance from the poor rate to every able-bodied labourer, graduated according to the number of his children and the price of bread. However benevolent the intention of the framers of such a scale might be, we cannot but consider it as a most mischievous invention, utterly subversive of the independence, industry, and happiness of the poorer classes.

It appears, also, that in many parts of the south of England, if the overseers or managers of the poor rate had any scruple (as, if ever they looked at the law, they might have had) in obeying the impolitic and ille-

* It will be seen, that all the districts in which riots have occurred amid the rural population, and where Special Commissions have, in consequence, been held, were named among these tainted counties. In Sussex, Wilts, and Bucks, the evil practice is perhaps most prevalent. The fires also have been almost confined to the counties mentioned in the text.

† Report, 1828, p. 6.

gal recommendations of the magistrates in this respect, by a forced and improper construction of a single ambiguous word in another part of the act, these scruples were effectually silenced.

On turning to that part of the statute which directs relief to be given to the lame and others, being poor and not able to work, and which empowers relief to be ordered by one magistrate, we find among those entitled to such relief, *the impotent*; and this has been frequently construed, throughout the southern counties, to extend to the young children of labourers or others, who are not thought by any magistrate able to maintain them, either from casual want of employment, the low rate of wages, or any other cause. We may remark, that these abuses appear to have had rise in mistaken benevolence during the high prices and rapid fluctuation in the value of bread from 1795 to 1815.

The pretence for any such practice is removed, but the evil arising from it is in full force. It cannot be necessary to enlarge upon the effects of these abuses, which are pointed out in the reports cited. It may be sufficient to say, that all the committees* who have considered the subject, and every writer, of the least authority, who has treated upon this matter for several years past, concur in deprecating the continuance and extension of the system.

Its effects are described as lessening forethought and industry, stimulating population where there is no adequate employment, depressing the *natural rate of wages*, and lessening the value of the poor man's sole possession, viz. his labour.

The Committee of 1828 state that, ' wherever the practices adverted to prevail, they have found there is a redundancy of labour, and that a proportion, varying from one-fifth to one-twelfth the number of able-bodied labourers belonging to the parish, are assisted by parish allowance or employment during several months of the year. The consequence of this redundancy is, that the wages are very low; as the labourers, exceeding in number the demand for their services, undersell each other in the market for employment; and being underpaid, become degraded, go to the parish-rate, as a matter of course, and lose the hope of improving their condition by their own efforts.'

' As, then, it appears,' says the Report, ' to your Committee, that the actual redundancy of labour is the principal source of the low wages and misery of the peasantry, it seems of consequence to consider whether that redundancy is kept up by anything in the practices alluded to?—because, if that is the case, it will follow that *low wages give rise to the practice of allowance, and the system of allowance reacts to keep wages low; so that, without some change in that which is alternately cause and effect, the evil may be continued in a vicious circle almost without limit.*

' In shortly stating the important principle which regulates the supply of labour, the Committee avail themselves of the words used in the Report on the Poor-Laws, in 1819, p. 7: "That the demand and supply of labour have, in the natural course of things, such a tendency to regulate and balance each other, (unless counteracted by artificial institutions,) that any excess of either arising from temporary causes, would, if met by temporary expedients, in no long time correct itself†."

* Report on Poor Laws, 1817;
Ditto ditto 1819;

Ditto on Labourers' Wages, 1824;

Reports on Emigration, 1826, 1827;

Report on Criminal Commitments, 1827;

Report on Abuses of Poor Law, 1828.

† Report, 1828.

We lament to say that these abuses of the poor laws, though chiefly prevalent in the southern counties before enumerated, are beginning to be introduced in some of the manufacturing districts. In the neighbourhood of Coventry it has made some progress among the silk weavers; and in the vicinity of Leicester many of the stocking weavers have had their wages made up from the poor rate*. Hence the returns and accounts of the sale of productions made by these workmen form no criteria of the real state of trade, which is kept up or extended at the expense of the rate-payers, who pay a portion of the miserable wages received by the men. Much better were it to slacken the supply of goods, till the demand rose to afford a just and honest remuneration for employment†.

It may not be improper to remark, even putting aside the injustice and impolicy of these practices, that, instead of really proving a saving to the employers, as they sometimes vainly suppose, by keeping wages low, these abuses cost, in the form of poor rate, and all the evils such a system engenders, much more than would pay the workmen ample wages ‡.

We will now turn to consider the means which should be taken in a parish where these abuses have some time prevailed, gradually to discontinue them. We must suppose that, in such a parish, there is a superabundance of labourers at one or other time of the year, beyond the employment for them at adequate subsistence wages. We will suppose this superabundance to be one-twentieth of the whole number. In either case, (that is, whether supported by parish work or parish allowance,) the cost will be nearly the same to the rate, but the effect to the men very different. If allowance be made from the rate in addition to wages, the whole number of men compete with each other for what work there is,— those assisted by the parish bounty underselling those without it, till the wages of the whole fall to such a point that all are obliged to have allowance, and all become reckless and careless as to their own exertions. If, however, the superabundant labourers be aided by employment found for them by the parish, they do not undersell the independent workmen, who are thereby enabled to earn adequate subsistence wages, and, being fairly paid, will exert themselves to maintain their independence.

Let us see then how, in such a parish, parochial employment may be provided, and what must be the nature of the employment.

- i. We must try to create additional employment in a particular spot.
- ii. It must interfere as little as possible with the ordinary work of the neighbourhood.
- iii. It must in itself, or the mode in which it is recompensed, be rather distasteful to those who receive it§.
- iv. It should be as much as possible of a temporary nature, and capable of increase or diminution, according to the exigency of the time.

* We feel convinced some mode of assisting working manufacturers, during temporary fluctuations in the demand for labour, must be devised; either by giving them facilities and inducements to insure themselves, or by providing employment at low-wages ready for an emergency. Our poor laws afford little aid in this matter, and were enacted before the great bodies of men to whom we refer were in existence. Neither can we neglect this subject without danger to all around us.

† Report on Manufacturers' Employment, 1830.

‡ In some instances, the immediate effect may be to lower wages, and the tenant supposes he is hereby benefited, though at the expense of permanently raising the rates, which must ultimately be deducted from rent. If proprietors and agents have the least perception of their own interest, separate (if it ever can be separate) from that of the working classes, they will immediately check such an abuse.

§ Report on Labourers' Wages, p. 7. This excellent Report was drawn up by Lord J. Russell.

It is not necessary to echo the common statement, that we have here a difficult task to perform.

The first thing to be done is to provide a workhouse, fitted for the reception of those who apply for employment and their families, and provided with adjacent work-yards for whatever work is in the particular vicinity found most eligible. To this may be added a small parish farm, which may be worked by spade husbandry. In the work-yards bricks and draining tiles may be made, stone or wood sawed, and other employments of a like nature carried on*. But it should never be supposed for an instant that any parish farm or fabric can pay for itself, much less make any profit. We must be content if, at an expense of one-third or one-half the workman's subsistence, we can support him out of temptation to crime, without injuring the independent workmen of the parish, and yet give the parish labourer his subsistence in such a form as to incite others to avoid his situation, by forethought, diligence, and exertion.

It will be a main point to be able to lay down as a general rule, that whoever comes for parish employment, shall come to be at the workhouse altogether, and with their families shall reside there; when there, they will be supported and employed entirely by the parish. The importance and good effect of this regulation has been shown in numerous instances, as in Liverpool and many other places†.

It is not our intention to state that parochial employment should never be given to able-bodied persons, unless they become resident in the workhouse; but this ought to be the rule, and the parish work to out-dwellers the exception. By this means it will be in the power of the select vestry, or their accountable officer, to act according to circumstances and the known character and conduct of the applicant; and this would go a great way towards deterring idle applicants and stimulating all workmen to industry and forethought. Another important advantage arising from this regulation will be, that it will draw a broad line of distinction, which should ever be preserved, between independent and parish workmen.

A benefit of as much consequence is, that this regulation will enable the managers of these workmen to find them in food, clothes, and other necessities, instead of paying them money wages; hereby preventing waste, and at the same time putting single and married men (whose families will be supported in the house) on a level in this respect. If paid in money, the married man, under pretence that he must be paid according to the number of his family, will receive more than the single man, and often divert it to his own purposes, leaving his family to suffer; besides making the single man discontented, who will naturally (seeing he loses instead of gains by not marrying improvidently) resolve to marry without regard to consequences.

A portion, however, of the remuneration to parish workmen should be given or kept for them in money, according to the quantity of work they

* Mr. M'Adam, in his evidence before the Committee on Labourers' Wages, in 1824, stated that, under the improved system of road-making, the proportion of expense would be two-thirds for manual labour, one-third for cartage; whereas formerly those proportions were reversed. He says, a very fruitful source of employment might be found in parishes undertaking to supply the road trusts with materials prepared for repairs; and states, the work to be done is *chiefly in the winter and spring months*, and women and children may earn their share.—pp. 13—15.

† Report on Abuses of the Poor-Laws, 1828, Appendix; Evidence of Messrs. Hale, Ellis, Bucknall, &c.

do ; hereby encouraging their exertions, and forming a small fund, by aid of which they may again emerge into independent work as soon as opportunity offers.

In order to carry these regulations into effect according to law, it will therefore be necessary for each parish, *where there are likely to be any number of applicants* for employment, to have a workhouse, and this they are empowered by law to provide if they are without. In some cases, however, and for small parishes, it will be a better plan to join (according to the provisions of the Act 9 Geo. I. c. 7.) with some adjacent parishes, for providing, by hiring or erecting, some suitable building as a joint workhouse, of which the cost shall be paid, however, *according to the number of inmates* sent by each parish each year ; the fixed expenses of the establishment being paid by a proportion settled for each parish beforehand.

One of the most difficult parts of the duty of the permanent overseer or select vestry, will be to devise employment for parish workmen, consistent with the rules before stated ; yet is it the most important. Above all, they must never bring the parish men into competition with independent workmen, so as to lower the wages of the latter ; nor accept employment which would have been given to others in the neighbourhood. Yet there are, in almost every parish, or in every neighbourhood (for it by no means follows the work should be within the parish), various jobs of work in draining, clearing water-courses, filling up or emptying pits, cutting off angles of fields, removing banks, and other similar occupations, which it would answer well to the proprietor or tenant to have done at one-half or two-thirds the usual wages, but which he would never undertake unless induced by such an advantage. For such works the overseer may contract, receiving the price stipulated from the proprietor employing parish men, and paying them whatever is necessary. Here is so much new employment induced by the cheapness of labour ; so far easing the parish rate, and not injuring independent workmen ; for without such inducement it would not have existed ; and yet, by its result, it contributes to the capital of the country, and the future additional employment of labour. Perhaps a good rule would be never to take any work of which the proprietor paid more than two-thirds the subsistence wages ; for otherwise he might then, or soon after, have, perhaps, employed independent workmen himself.

Many landed proprietors, in such an emergency, on seeing the overseer zealously seeking out fresh employment, such as we have described, would come forward to make some ornamental alteration in their grounds, to cut a private canal or piece of water, or in some way furnish new work ; perceiving, as they would, that by as much as they thus gave towards the wages of labour, by so much did they relieve the rates which were paid by themselves or their tenants ; so that they would gain with one hand as much as they would lose with the other ; and this is an answer to what would otherwise be a good objection,—‘ That such proprietors, by withdrawing their expenditure in some other way to lay it out in such bribed or induced improvement, only take it from the support of independent mechanics or workmen elsewhere to assist parish workmen at home.’

A still more difficult case may arise, however, than that we have been considering. There are, unfortunately, parishes where the abuses described have prevailed for a very considerable time, where many have

married and brought up families, depending on this parish allowance for each child ; and where, in consequence of this parish bounty thus illegally offered on improvident marriages, there is a large proportion of workmen for whom it is impracticable to find any independent employment in or near the parish. It is clear that it would be very harsh and unjust to condemn to residence in a workhouse those whom our own neglect and misconstruction of the law have placed in their present position ; yet as long as they remain in the parish without additional employment, they must compete with and undersell all the other workmen, who would otherwise be enabled to gain enough to maintain their families independently. With regard to new applicants for parish assistance, there will be no injustice in giving notice (and this should be enforced by a declaratory Act of Parliament) that, *for the future*, the law will be adhered to*, and that parish assistance will alone be given in the form and mode described by the statute, and as administered in the northern parts of England.

What are we then to do with the labourers, redundant as regards that particular parish, for whom we are bound, if not by law, yet by justice (owing to our own neglect) to find comfortable employment.

It will be the cheapest, and the most just and politic way, to face the difficulty at once. We will suppose, in the parish in question, there are one hundred labourers, and one-tenth (ten) are without independent employment, unless by competing with the other ninety, some or all of whom will become partially dependent on the parish.

These ten men, we will suppose, will, with their families, require each 10s. per week for their support, that is in all 260*l.* per annum. This, therefore, will be their expense, supported by the parish either in idleness, or partial work *taken from the other workmen*. This 260*l.* will be to be borne by the parish during the lives of these ten labourers, and of such of their families as would stand in their places.

How then can we best provide for these men, whom we must somehow support ? It is evident we must either remove them to some other place, where labour is not redundant, and where the value of their work may support them, or we must in some way create additional employment within their reach at home. We will first consider the latter alternative, as the most easy of execution, and practicable with little or no change in the law as it stands†.

The plan we propose is, for the parish or individual proprietors (led, as we shall see, by interest as much as humanity) to offer to the unemployed labourers for a term of years, at a low fixed rent, such a portion of land, to be worked principally by spade husbandry, as shall be sufficient for the support of their families. (Let not our readers exclaim impatiently against us, but follow out the considerations we lay before them.) We suppose this quantity to be on an average about six acres, (but this will be regulated by the quality of the land, size of the family, &c.) It will be necessary to erect on these spade farms such small buildings or sheds as may be necessary for their cultivation ; by the plots being adjacent to each

* This may be done even without a declaratory Act, by the justices at sessions resolving and stating publicly their resolution to adhere to the law, as acted on for the most part in the north ; but, at the same time, the most strenuous and extensive exertions must be made for the employment of those aided from the parish during the transition to a better system.

† Voluntary emigration, properly conducted, may, in some cases, be preferable ; but requires details beyond what our limits will allow.

other, one small barn centrally situated, to be used in a certain rotation by each, may serve several workmen. A stipulation must be made in the leases, that there shall be *no division or under-letting*, and that no such labourer *shall work for any one but himself, except in the harvest month*. A sufficient outfit in stock, seeds, tools, &c., must be found for those in want of them to begin with.

Each unemployed labourer would thus be changed into an employed workman supporting himself, or into a spade farmer working his own land, on an assurance that, *according to his industry* and care, would be his gains and the condition of his family; and thus the strongest motives, which have been found effectual in all other conditions, would be brought to bear on his mind. As he found his state improve and hope broke upon him, his efforts would be redoubled to maintain his place.

Let any one compare the produce of six acres trenched, pulverised, and worked like a garden, with the produce of the same land comparatively neglected. This subject has been considered by many intelligent practical men; and though some were at first distrustful of our calculations, on examination they have almost universally become convinced we were right*. We do not say there are not difficulties to be overcome; but they are not insuperable; we have but a choice of difficulties, and the advantages to be derived from success in such an experiment are incalculable.

In the agricultural operations necessary to be carried on in a spade farm, there will be occupation for the workman's wife and children; the latter will thus early be brought up in habits of industry and obedience: the great difficulty will be to prevent the exhaustion of the land by over-cropping; but this may be avoided by judicious regulations as to rotation of crops, and a well-considered plan for keeping up a stock of manure†. When this is once thoroughly understood by the working tenant, he will be convinced it is his *own interest* to follow it; and there is no bond like self-interest.

In many well-cultivated cottage gardens, wheat and potatoes succeed each other as crops for many years; such a course would be very injurious in ordinary husbandry; but the exhaustion of the land is compensated by extra manure, and the more perfect working of the soil by hand labour. It is well known that in dry weather turning up and stirring the earth in drills refreshes the crops almost as much as rain.

By keeping pigs, or perhaps a cow (tied up in a shed and soiled as on the continent), every bit of refuse may be consumed on the premises, and much manure be returned to the land.

Every agriculturist, acquainted with the fertility arising from the pulverisation and frequent stirring of the earth, as detailed by the best writers on husbandry, will allow our expectations are not over-sanguine.

The occasional hire of a horse and cart, to bring home the crop or to fetch a load of lime, may sometimes be wanted; the rest will be done by hand or with a barrow.

The experiment of these spade farms has been made on a sterile soil in Holland with great success, and we refer with pleasure to the accounts and details of those trials. The cost of the necessary outfit may be raised from the parish rate, in order 'to set the poor to work;' and by the

* Lord Braybrooke's account of the success of some spade farms in Essex.

† In the account of the poor colonies of Holland are some valuable accounts of the mode of economising and increasing the value of agricultural manure.

59 Geo. III. c. 12 the parish is empowered to rent twenty acres for the same purpose.* But we feel convinced that many land-owners, when once this plan had been fairly tried, would themselves commence such spade farms, where there were redundant labourers, both from motives of humanity and policy. It has been said, on the one hand, that labourers will be so fond of having an independent bit of land in their own management that the best labourers would be desirous of becoming such tenants ; this would very probably be the case. In consequence, they would want less outfit, and the benefit would be the same to the community, as thereby a number of workmen equal to those unemployed would be taken out of the labour market, and the wages of the rest would rise so as to maintain them in independence. Supposing, however, instead of earning on their spade farms *quite* enough for the maintenance of their families, as we believe they would,—supposing, for instance, 26*l.* per annum being necessary, they only earned 20*l.*, what would be the consequence?—that the parish, or their landlord, by means of a gift of coal, corn, seed, or some indirect assistance, should make up the difference until they were able to walk alone. In the interval, the parish will have gained all that they save by the man's own gains, for before, they had to support him entirely ; the condition of all the other workmen will be improved by the removal of his competition for their employment, and the man himself, fully and beneficially occupied, will be contented, because he has a fair prospect of improving his condition, and knows the fruits of his industry will be his own.† If on a farm of 100 acres, under the common system, two labourers are constantly employed through the year, the same land divided into spade farms as proposed would find occupation for sixteen, and supersede there, in great measure, the use of horse labour.

These benefits are not to be gained without pains and perseverance ; but the experiment is absolutely necessary, and will well repay any benevolent proprietor or rate-payer the trouble necessary to attain success. It must be gratifying to think that, instead of being unpopular among the poor, they would be eager and grateful to embrace the proposition made them ;—the regulations necessary must be well considered, and firmly adhered to, especially that of each man being *constantly employed on his own land*.

Let it be remembered, at last, that this plan † is not recommended for general or permanent adoption, but only as a *temporary* means of lessening

* By a late act extended to fifty acres.

† We may add, that if, under the proposed plan (which would at least be popular with the peasantry), we had to pay the *whole* of the cost of their subsistence (26*l.* per annum each), it would still be much more to our interest than to continue the allowance system, because, in the latter case, the cost is *perennial*, in the former, it ends with the lives of the annuitants.

‡ We will mention two plans for the assisting of agricultural labourers, not directly connected with the subject before us ; but will yet, we hope, be useful, and may either of them be carried into effect by benevolent landholders. The first in action in several places, is very simple. The landlord, or a society raising the funds by subscription, offer to any labourer who will lay by sixpence, or any smaller sum, per week, to add to it half the amount at the end of the year, and lay out the whole in some useful thing to be given to the contributor. This has been found popular among the peasantry, and might, with some changes, be adapted to towns also. The second is general in several parts of Holland, and consists of an insurance office on a simple principle, established and guaranteed by the local authorities and persons of property, in which workmen and labourers, by paying a small sum, can insure, in case of death, a provision for their widow and for each child, till old enough to support himself. In one part of Holland we were told the female peasantry used to consider this right of dower as greatly favourable to the claims of any suitor.

ing a great existing evil DURING A TRANSITION from a bad administration of the poor laws to an improved system ! It is essentially different from any plan of dividing farms into various cottage holdings, and building new dwellings therein, which would only stimulate population, increase the number of labourers in a particular district, already too full, and thereby eventually much augment instead of diminish the evil complained of.

March, 1832.

ABSTRACT OF PAROCHIAL EXPENDITURE.

Parish of

	183	18 Past Year	More.	Less.	Cause of Difference.
Poor's Rate in Year . .					
Rate in Pound in Year . .					
Rate in Pound on Rack Rent .					
Highway Rate . .					

EXPENDITURE OF POOR RATES.

County Rate . .					
Infirm and Poor .					
In-Poor—Cost . Number . .					
Out-Poor—Cost . Number . .					
Illegitimate and } Cost Orphan Children } No.					
2 Able Bodied—Cost . and Number .					
By Work . . If otherwise, How ?					
Casual Poor . .					
Law Expenses . . Salaries . .					
Repairs, Rent, Stock, &c. . .					
Population from Returns . .	1821	1831			
General Observations on State of Poor, &c.					

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